VIII
Paper
Plays

"The unconscious is structured like a language."

Lacan, Jacques

Houska.

I... I've come so far to see you and...
Beautiful day, isn't it?
Me? I'm Sniff, pleased to meet you!
If I know you? Why, of course I do!

We've seen each other before, haven't we?
Moominvalley? That's right, I live here.
Where do you live?
Oh, that's such a nice place to live in.
No, I have never been there,
but maybe one day I'll be.

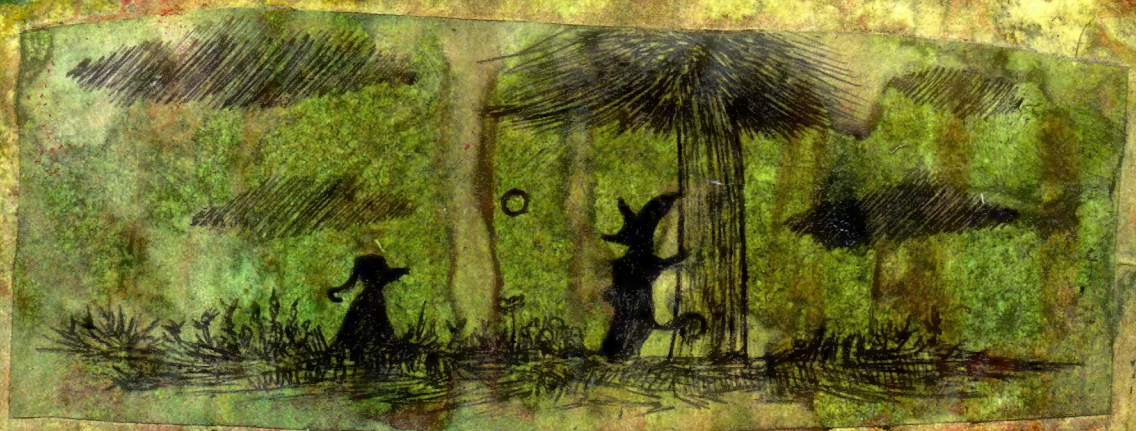
Forget We Ever Met

Story & Art by

Janet Wallace

I don't think
I want to leave this place yet.
One day, I'll be rich
and then I can afford travelling
around the world by myself.
It's a dream I have nurtured
since childhood.

Yes, by myself,
I'm not sure if anyone else
will come with me,
and I don't want to lead a life
filled with uncertainties.



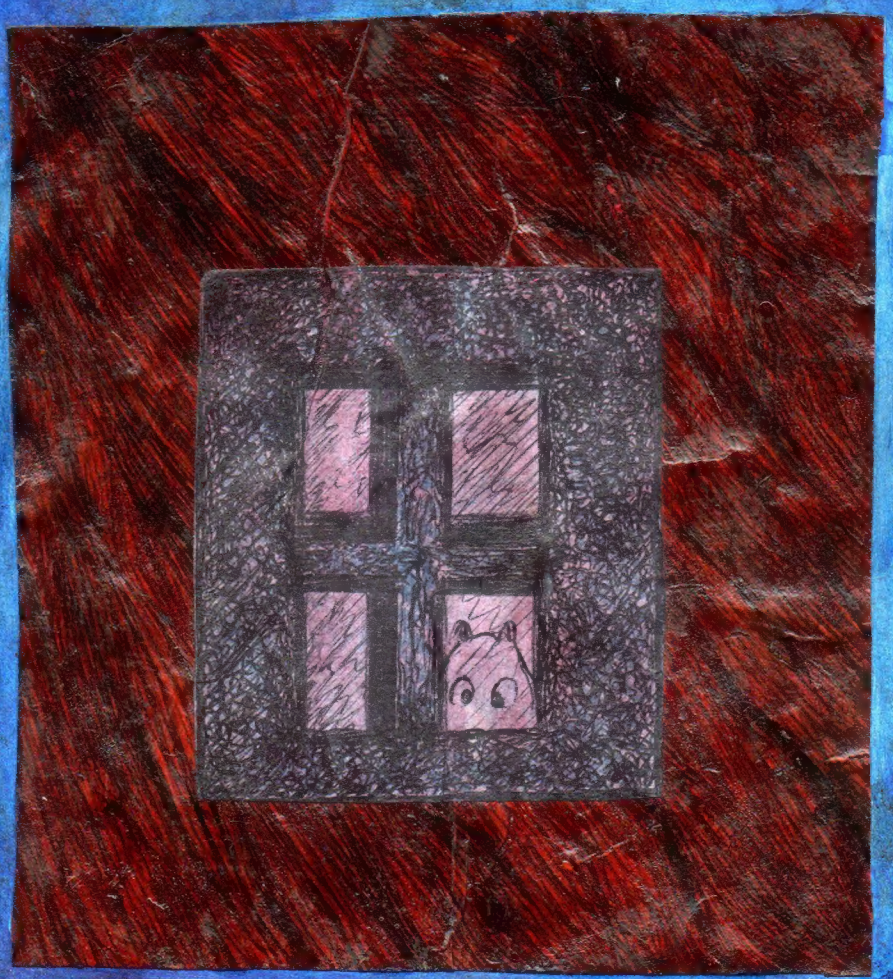
Nice flowers.
Are they yours?
Oh, I see.
You took care of them.

Mr. Hemulen
appreciates flowers as well.
Do you know him? Mr. Hemulen?
He has quite a beautiful garden
outside his house.
Sure, I can
present him to you.

Snufkin
You♥
Silly Filly
Me :)
Moomintroll
Mr. Hemulen
If he's my friend? Why, yes.
I have lots of friends.
You don't know their names?
Quite a few of them, you mean?

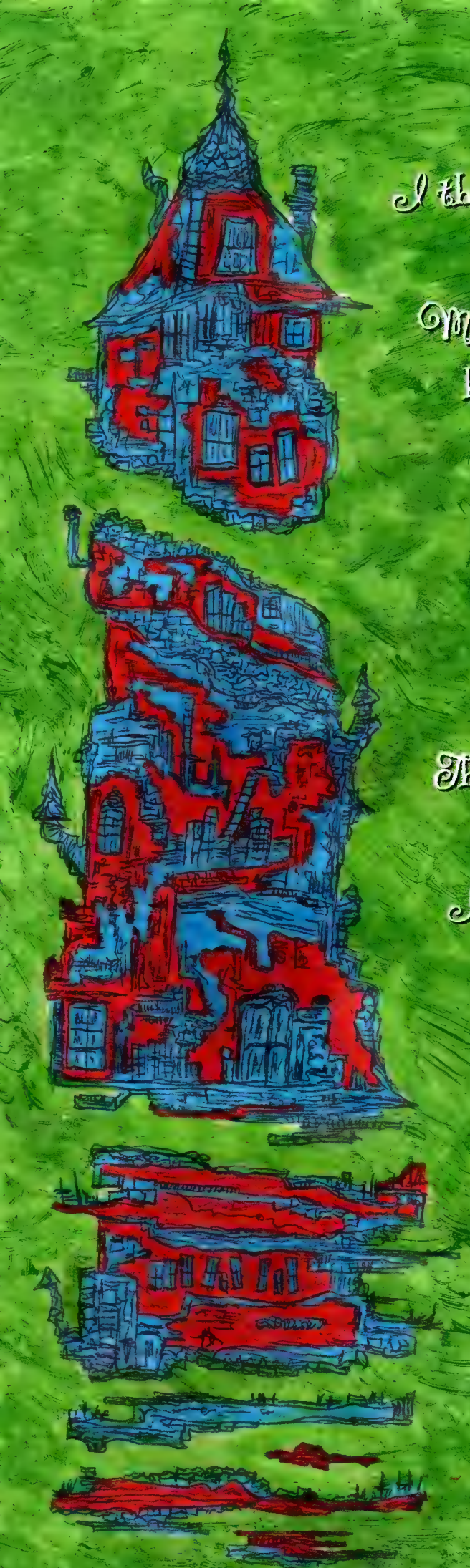
That's fair.
Don't worry,
you'll get to
know them better.
I know
because I struggled
with making friends too.
It's hard, I know.
Really hard.

You mean if I'm friends with "Moo mint roll"?
Wait, who's that? Never heard of that name before.
Wait a moment... Uh huh... Oh, no, no!
I'm sorry, but his name is Moomintroll, you silly!



Moomintroll? Yes, he is my friend, of course.
Always has been, I'd say.

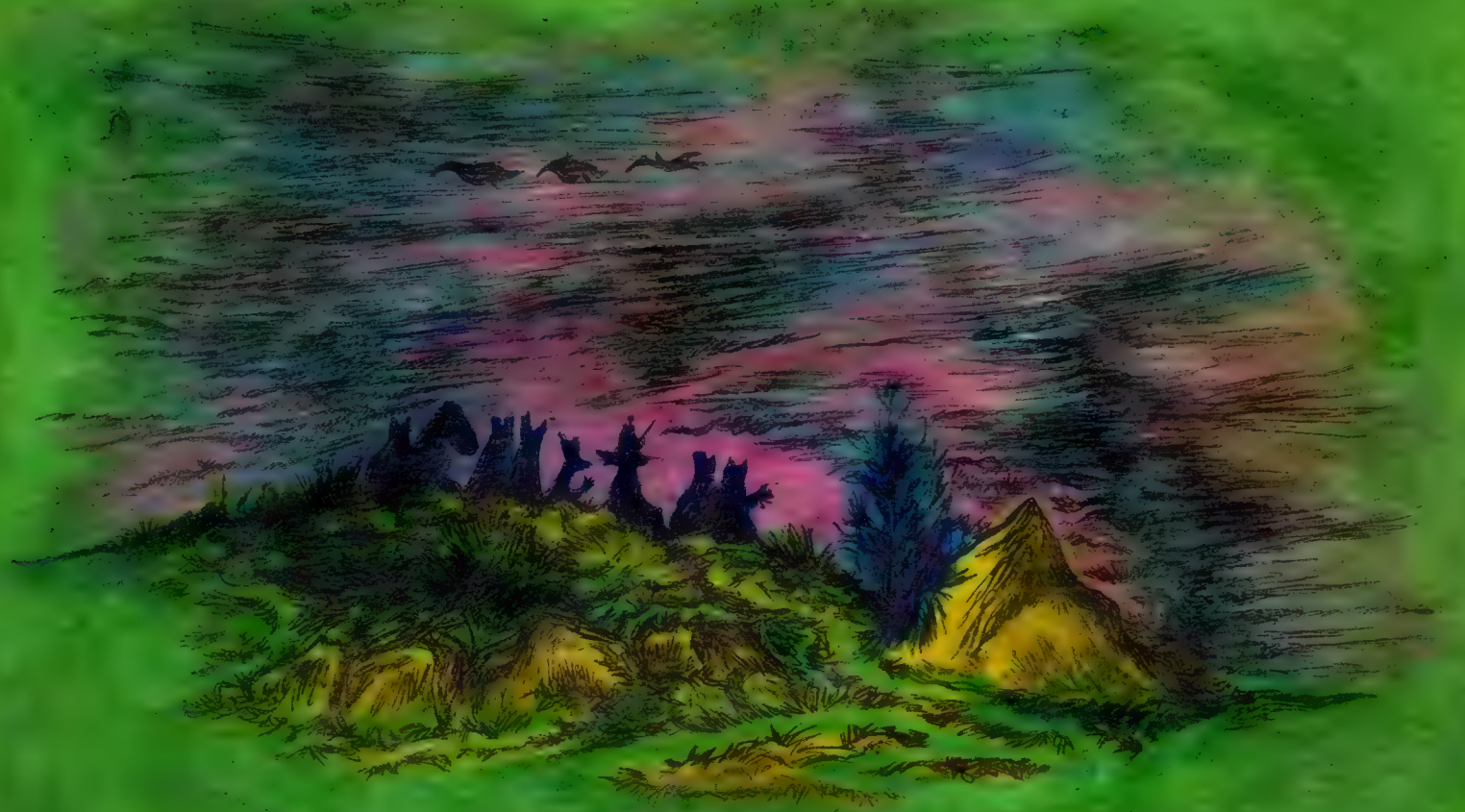
He lives in a blue house with his family.
They used to live elsewhere
before they moved into Moominvalley.
Yes, I know because I've been here for a long time.



I was lost in the woods,
I thought I'd never see or feel the sun again
until the Moomins arrived.
Moomintroll was one of my first friends,
his mother took care of me and, yeah,
it's quite a story.
Maybe I'll tell the rest later,
I'm not in the mood of digging
my own past right now.

The blue house? No, I don't live there,
I have my own house.
I visit the Moomin family very often,
I owe them my life.

Whenever I can,
I go there to see if they're alright.
There is Moominpappa,
Moominmamma,
Moomintroll himself...
I guess that's all
for the members of the family.



They are such kind people, let me tell you.
I wonder who I would be without them.
I would not even be here, probably.

I got more friends other than the Moomins.
There's Mr. Hemulen, as mentioned before, and...
Oh! There's Snufkin,
he is one of my friends, as well as Moomin's.
Snorkmaiden is my friend too, yeah.

Ever heard of Little My?
You might think she's annoying
but if you know her better,
Little My has a soft spot. Everyone does.

Uh... You see,
that's why
I'm here...
Here to say, uh...
I don't want
to be here, but...
I have to.
It's the right thing
to do.

You see,
the first time we met...
It was a disaster,
and I can't forget,
no matter how much
I try...
I tried, but I failed
many times, and...

Houska...

I'm here to say that I...

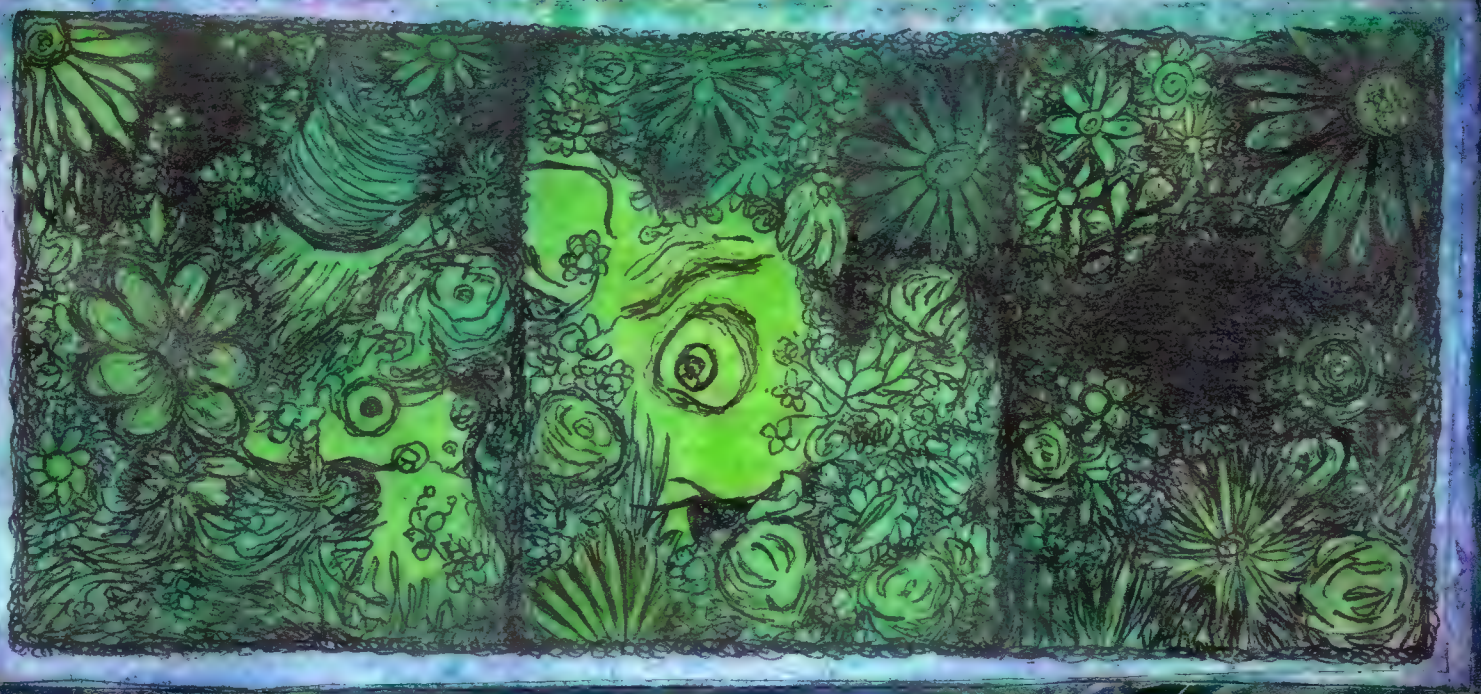
I am sorry about
your flowers, and...
I should not have...
I should have known better that...

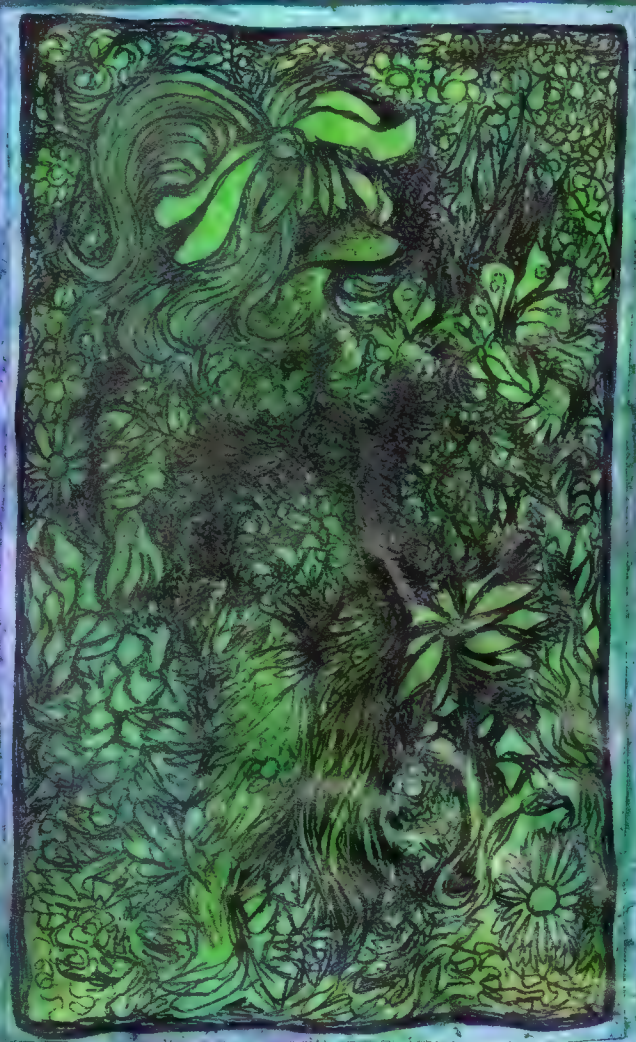
Your flowers... I ruined
your flowers, and I'm deeply sorry.
I didn't want to startle your flowers
or make you upset, you see.

I did not want to... I just...

Wanted to say that I...
I thought that...

I wasn't thinking.





Back then,

my mind was

somewhere

else.

It was not

me talking...

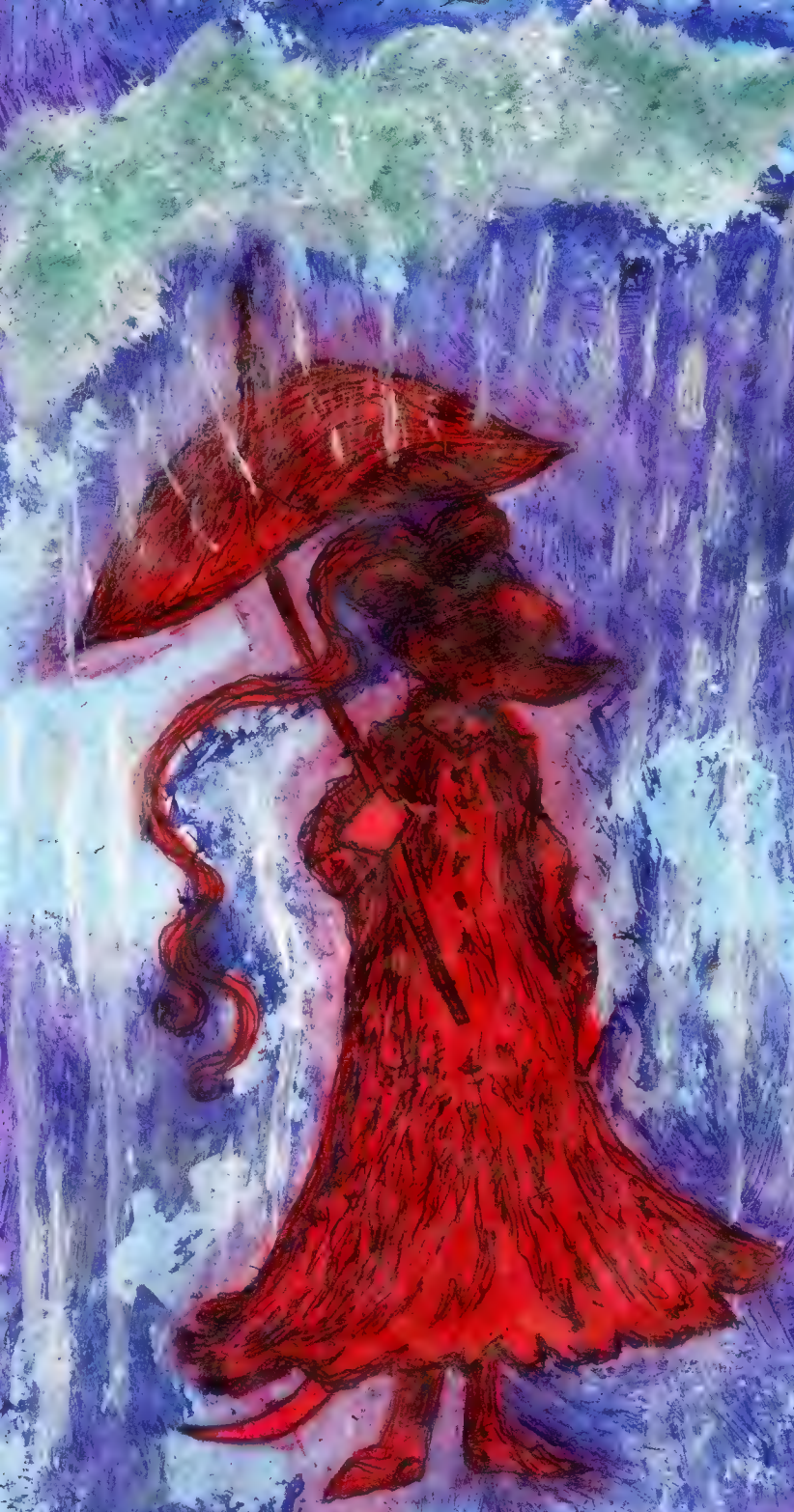
I...

I was,

how do you

say... Lost

in the green?



Maybe, but today...

I feel better.

I... I feel a lot better...
I feel like I am
truly myself,
and...

It was not me who, uh...

I was there, but...
This is me talking...

The one Sniff
you're looking at,
this is who I really am...

And I feel...
I feel it's the right thing
to do after I...

I did not want to do it.

I'm here to say that
I can't stop thinking
about the day
we first met, and...

I am sorry.

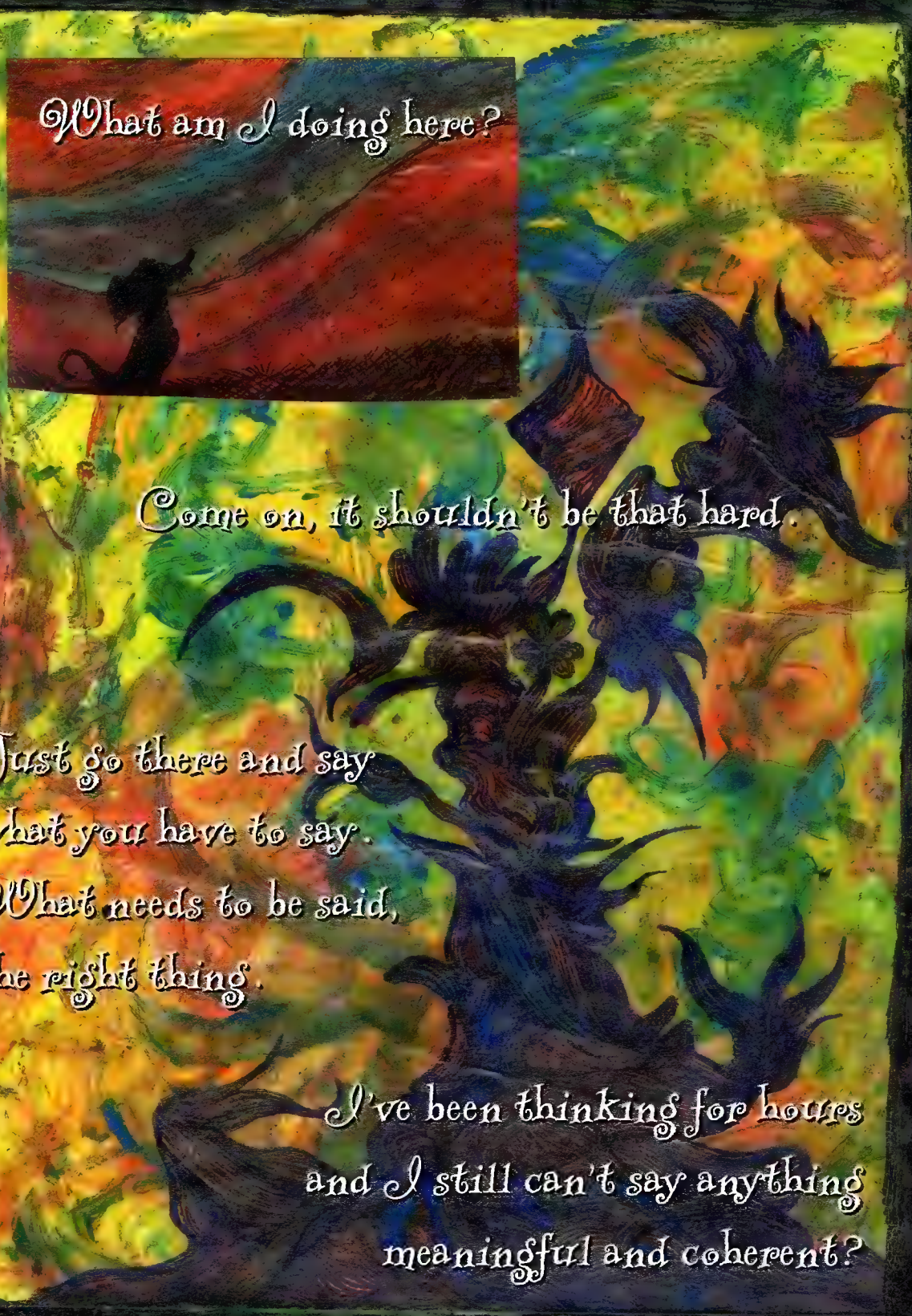
Sorry...
I didn't mean
to say those things...

Your poor flowers,
I didn't mean to hurt them...
And... Don't be mad at me,
I want to...

I didn't know how you felt,
why can't we just...

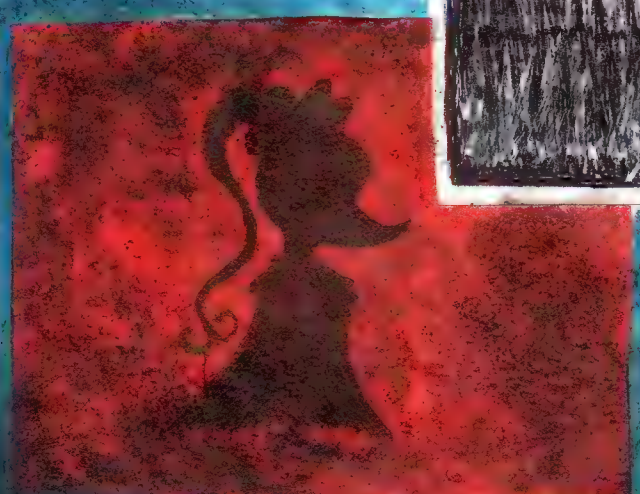
Why...

Don't you like me for what I am?


What am I doing here?
Come on, it shouldn't be that hard.
Just go there and say
what you have to say.
What needs to be said,
the right thing.
I've been thinking for hours
and I still can't say anything
meaningful and coherent?

Oh, please, I stared right
into the Groke's eyes!
I saw the comet's descent
and survived to tell the story!

But this?
This is ridiculous.



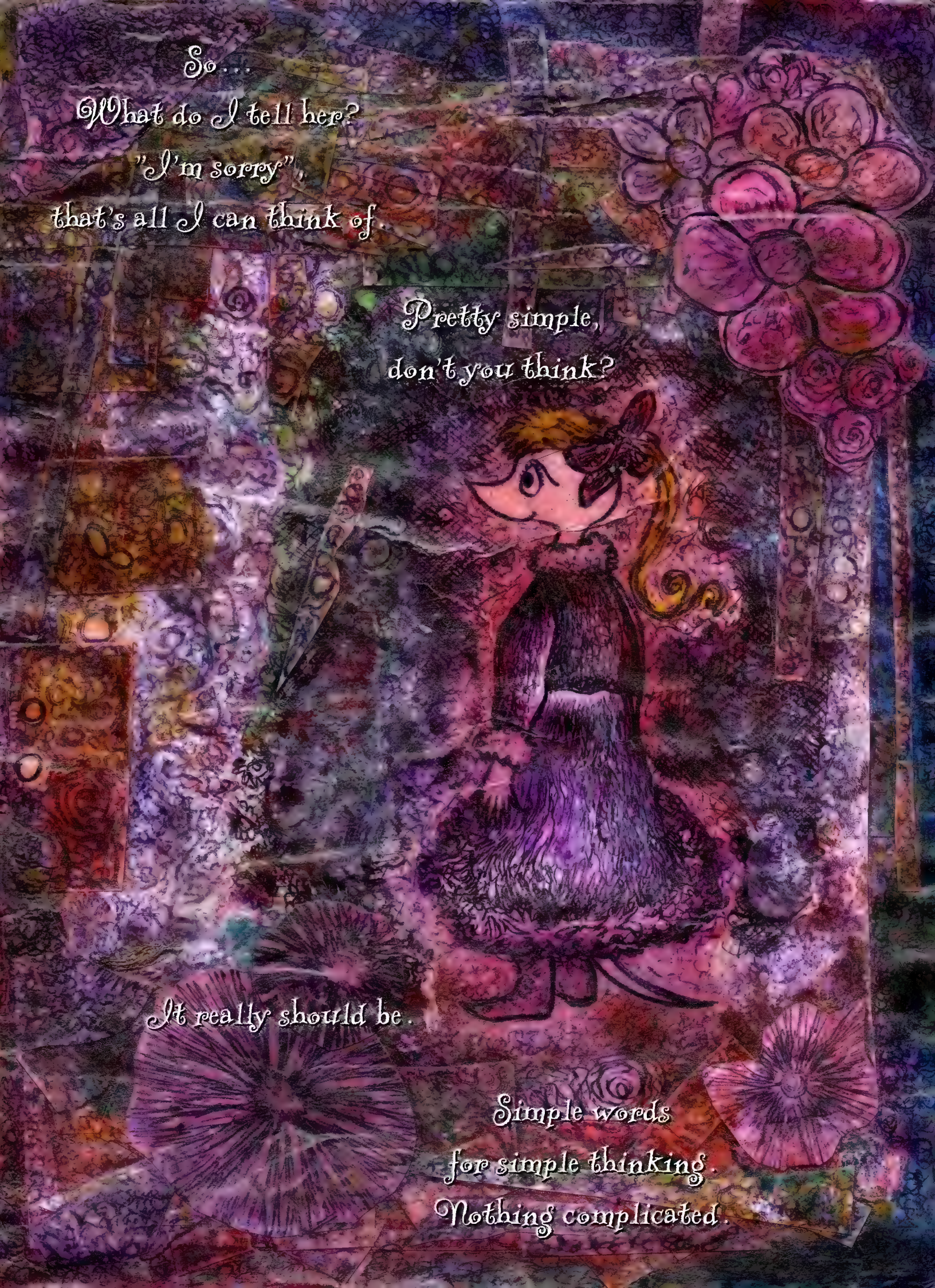
It's as if
I'm trapped
behind a
wall of glass,
unable to
convey
my feelings.

So stupid . . .
Houska surely
feels the same way.
Does she?

I have no idea
how she feels.
I have no idea
how I should feel.

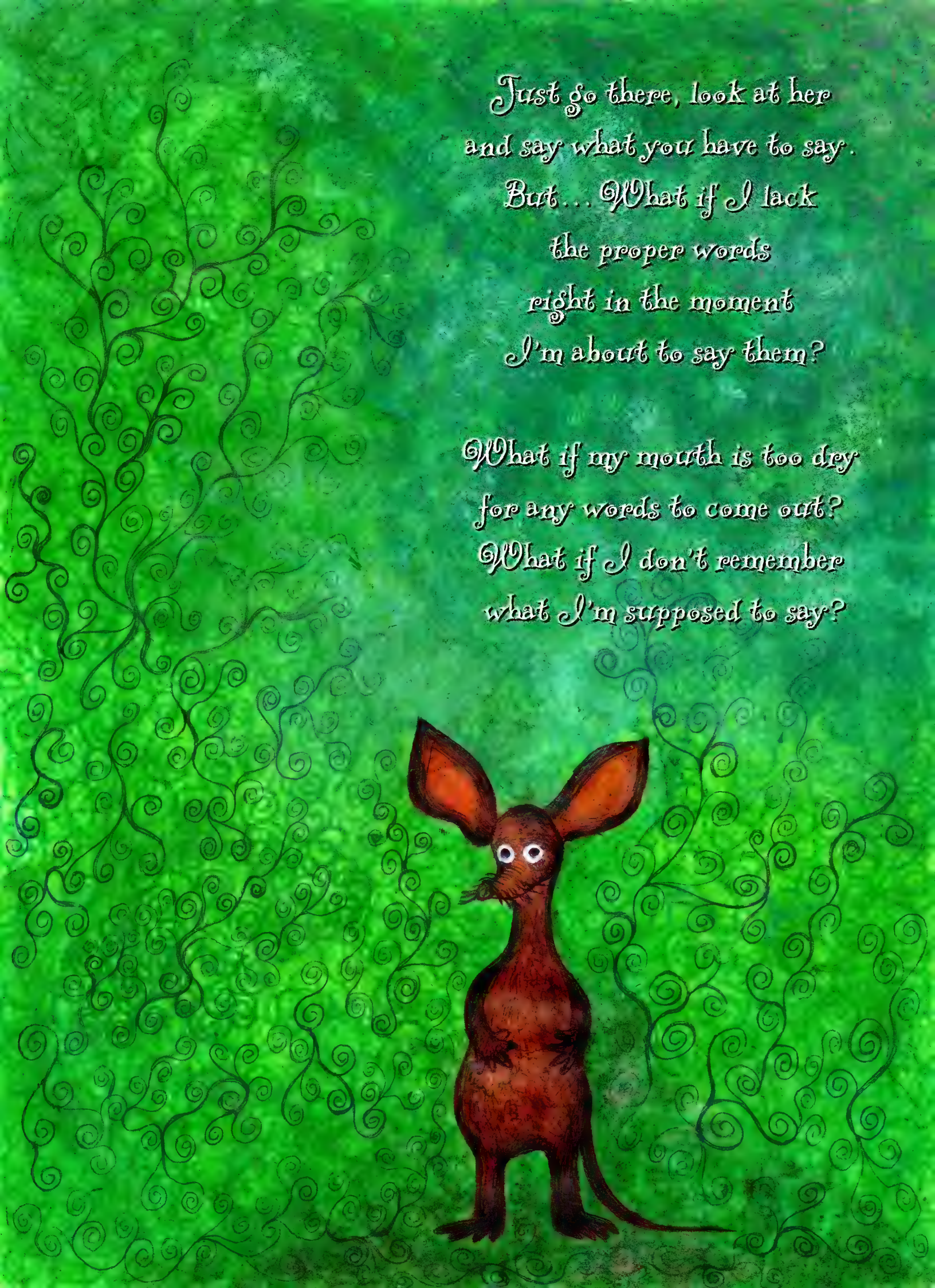
She's right there,
watering her flowers,
and you're here,
thinking and overwhelming
yourself with thoughts.

Are you afraid
your tongue will slip
and you'll say something bad?
Is there anything else to say
that isn't bad?


So...
What do I tell her?
"I'm sorry",
that's all I can think of.
Pretty simple,
don't you think?
It really should be.
Simple words
for simple thinking.
Nothing complicated.

Just go there, look at her
and say what you have to say.
But... What if I lack
the proper words
right in the moment
I'm about to say them?

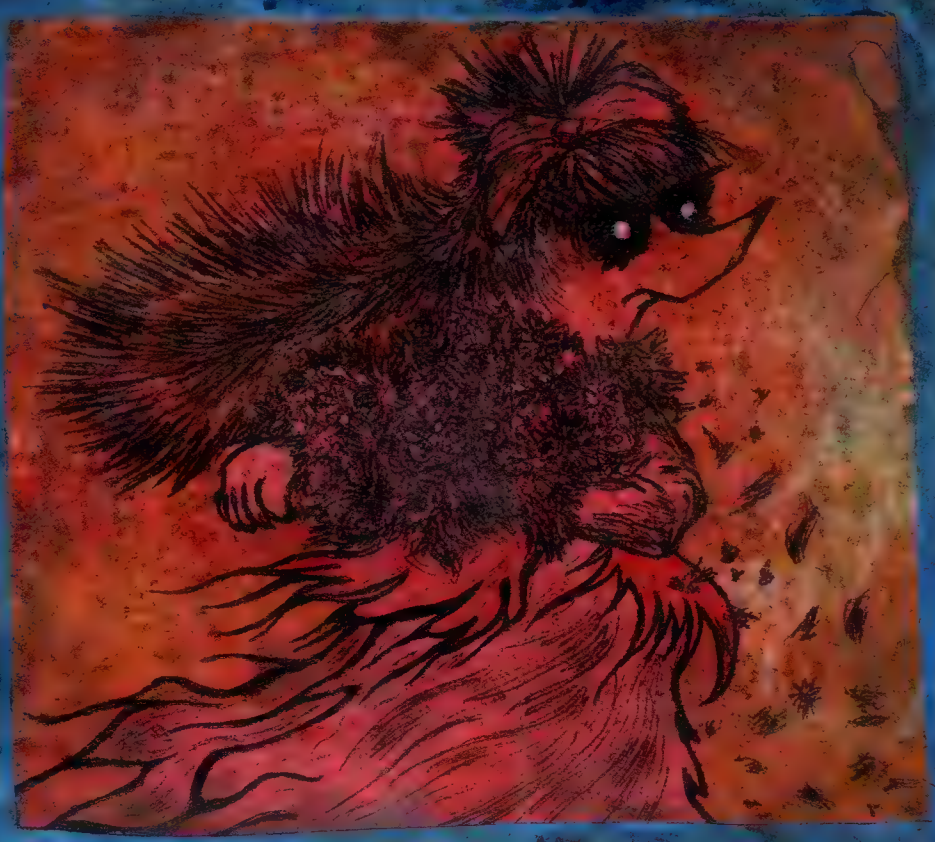
What if my mouth is too dry
for any words to come out?
What if I don't remember
what I'm supposed to say?



Oh, don't be silly!
You'll remember it.
But what if
I don't remember?
That's what worries me.

What if I yell at her?
My heart would shatter into
a thousand pieces if I did that.

And what about her heart?
Isn't it already in pieces
after what you did to the poor thing?
Do you know how she feels inside?



Alone
and unreal,
but that's a guess.

There's no room
for doubt and
second-guessing here.

I don't want to say anything that might hurt her.

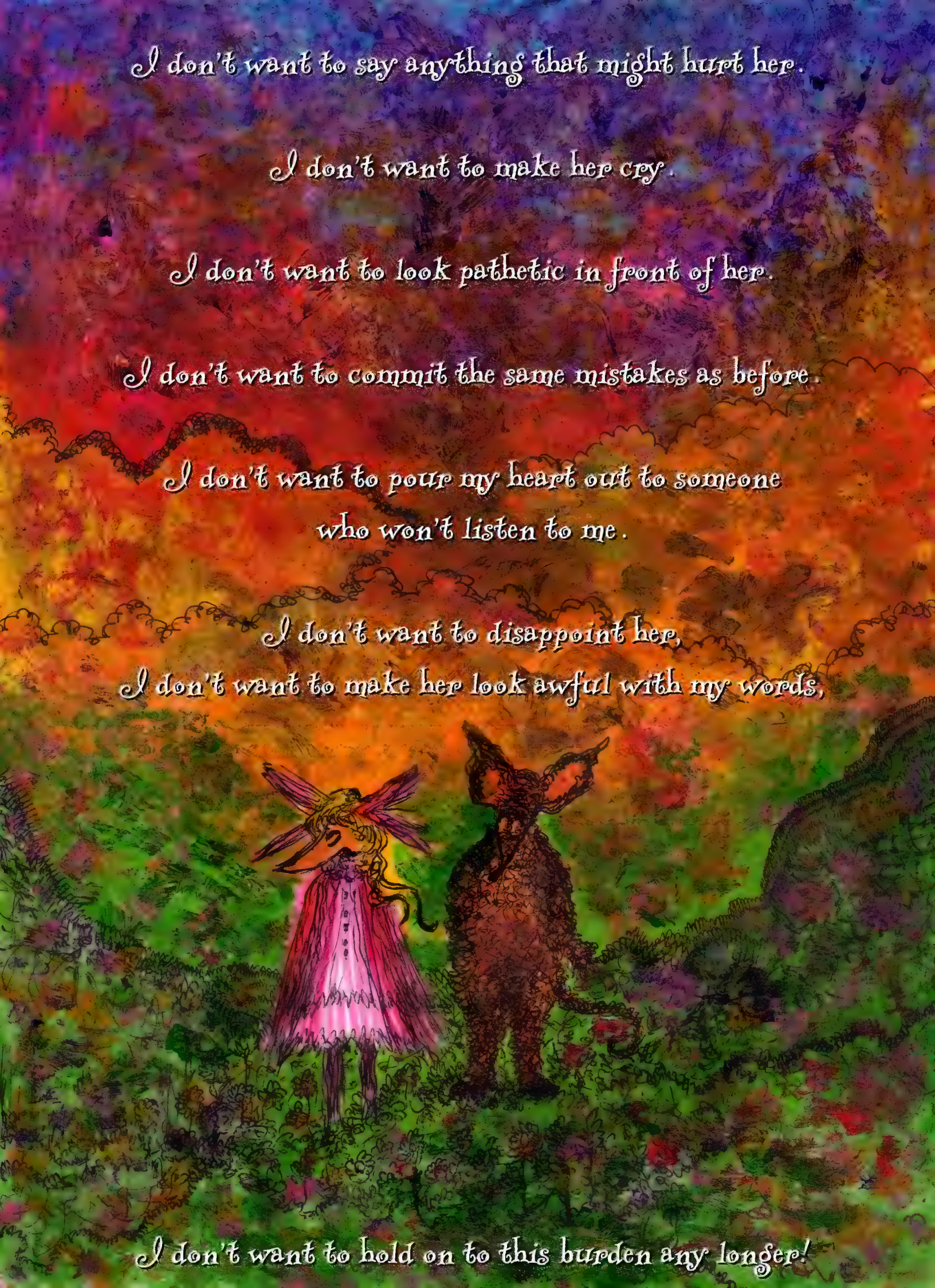
I don't want to make her cry.

I don't want to look pathetic in front of her.

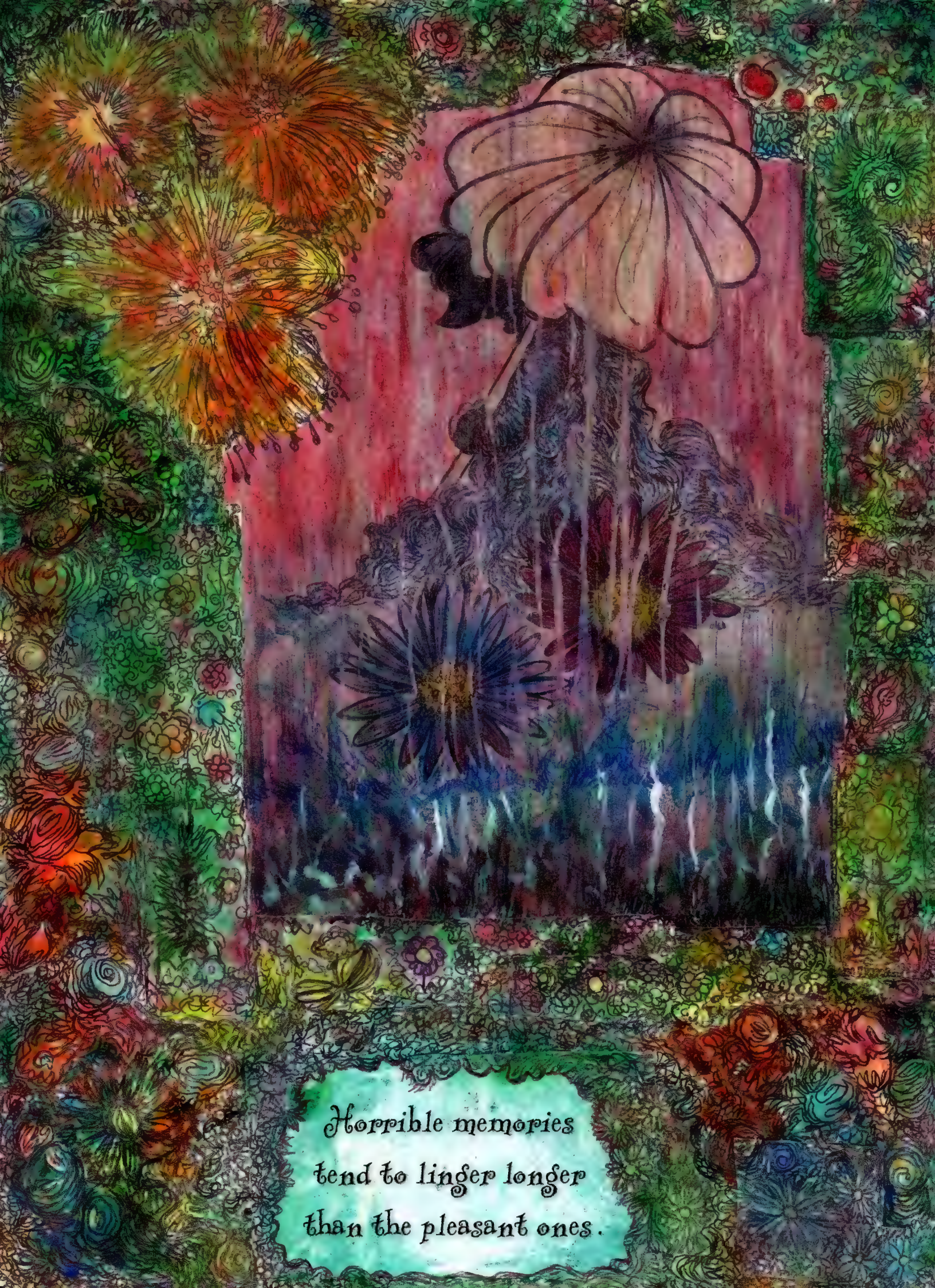
I don't want to commit the same mistakes as before.

I don't want to pour my heart out to someone
who won't listen to me.

I don't want to disappoint her,
I don't want to make her look awful with my words,



I don't want to hold on to this burden any longer!


Horrible memories
tend to linger longer
than the pleasant ones.

Do we even have
good memories
of each other?
We don't.

Well, I could just forget she exists
and move on with my life, as Snufkin proposed back then,
but I'm not him.

I'm not the lone wanderer who leaves his friends behind
to travel whenever winter comes.

To be honest,
I came to forget her
and it was good
while it lasted.

Now, I can't live
knowing that
someone hates me
and that it's my fault.

What should I do?
If I come near Houska,
she will rip the heart out of my chest
and laugh.

Will she?
As if you haven't done worse.

I haven't seen her in quite a long time
and I don't think she wants to see me ever again.

She made it clear last time:
"...And don't you ever show yourself
in front of me again, you barbarian!
You murderer! Flower thief!
Assassin!...";

I was called all sorts of names on that day and...

Was it really her
who was talking?

Suddenly, it was almost as if a terrible impersonation of herself
had crawled into her and that perverse creature
I had summoned took her place
and began to assimilate
with her being,
and she was
no longer
herself.

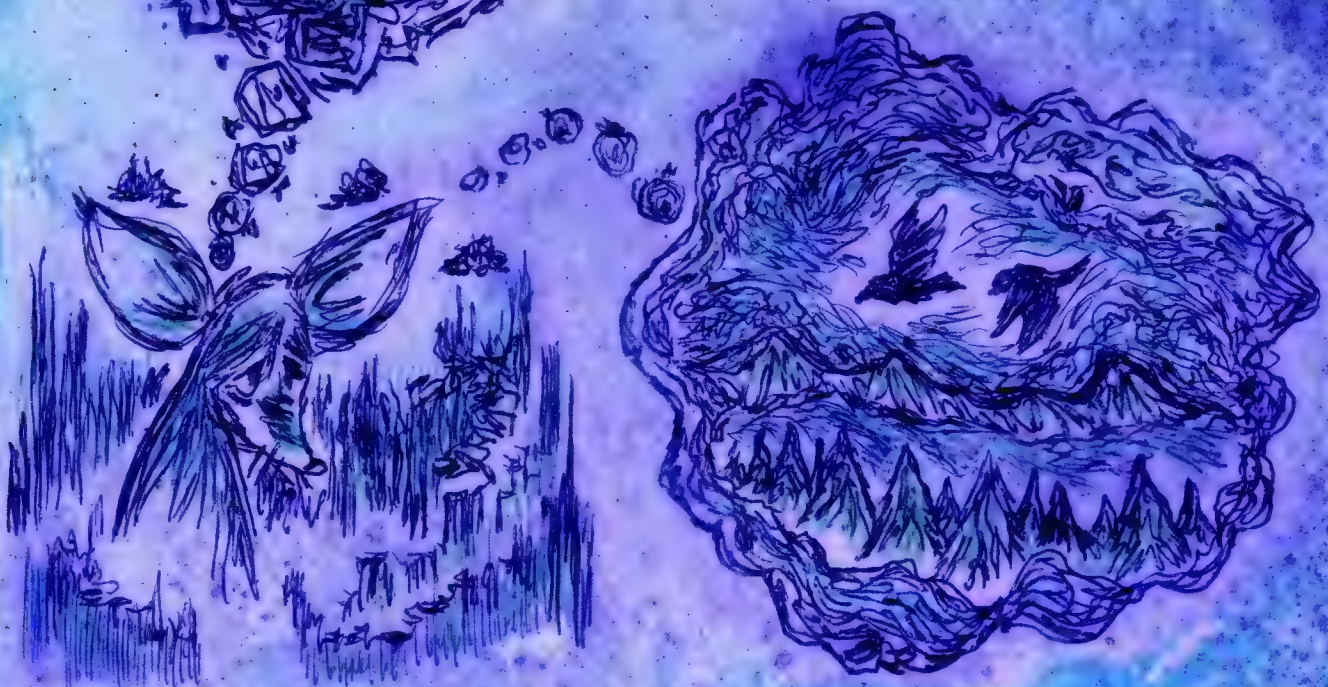
I saw
what she
really looked like
beneath the pale
and tender skin.

How come anger makes a person
unrecognizable beyond themselves?

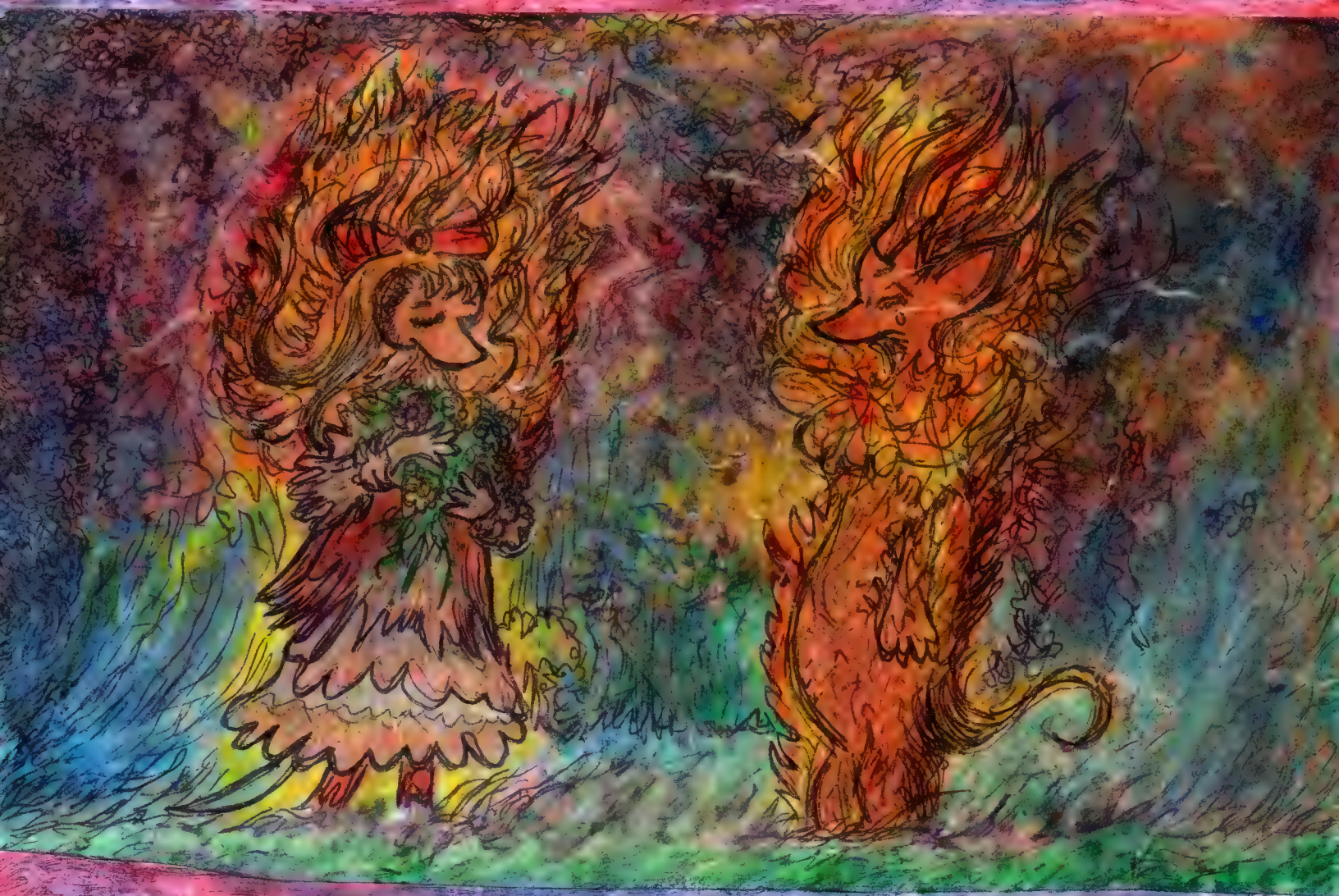
She said those hurtful things when she was upset.

I don't blame her,
I too would be very upset
if a stranger came to me
and shouted
"I LOVE YOU!"
out of nowhere
and then
ripped my flowers
and...

Did I really do that
to her? I did.
And I'm very sorry.



Houska was just minding
her own business
when I came in
and ruined everything.
She likes flowers...
But not on a bouquet, you imbecile.



I didn't mean to pick her flowers.
As a matter of fact,
I didn't know that she was
pulling out the weeds so that the flowers
could grow freely in the open field.

How could I know?

If only I had the chance to talk with her
instead of struggling to find any words
to say when all I had
in mind was...

It was... Love?

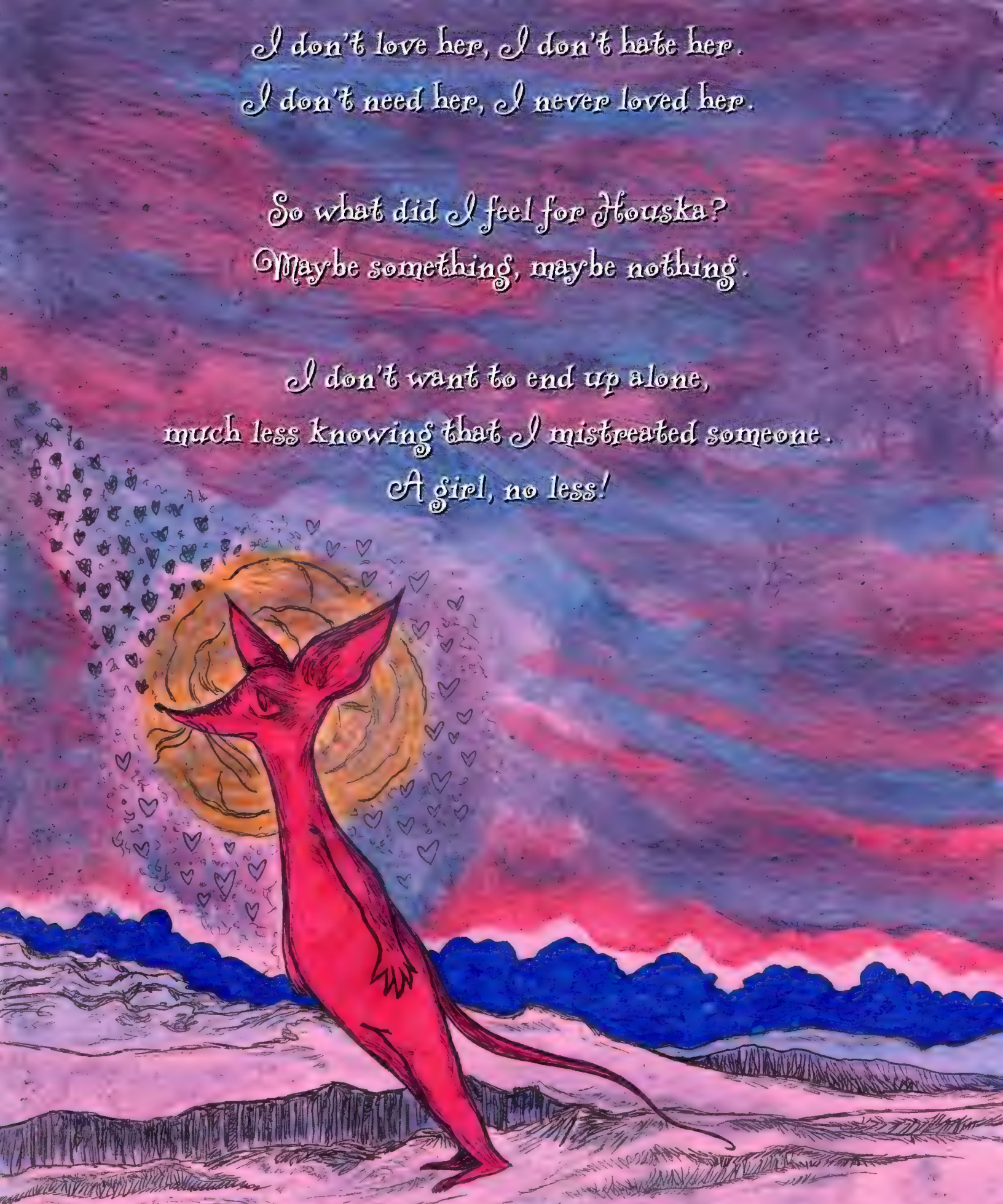
But I don't feel anything anymore,
yet I feel something.

Is it guilt? Shame? Regret?
A combination of all three?

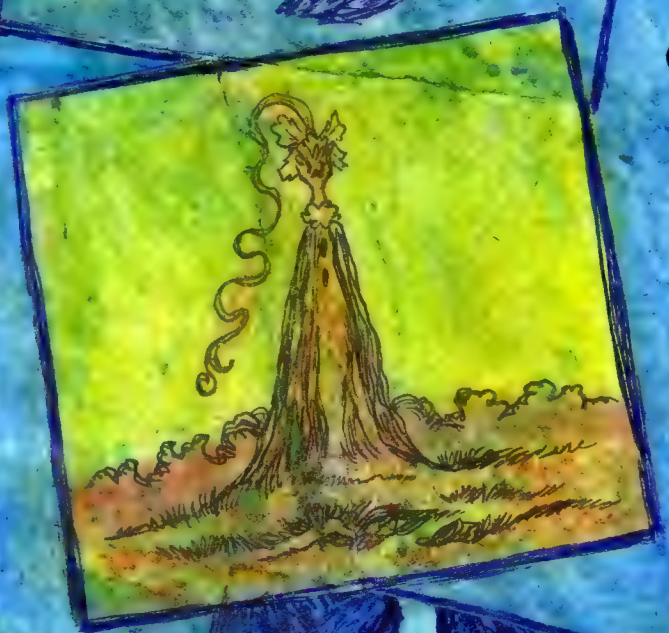
I don't love her, I don't hate her.
I don't need her, I never loved her.

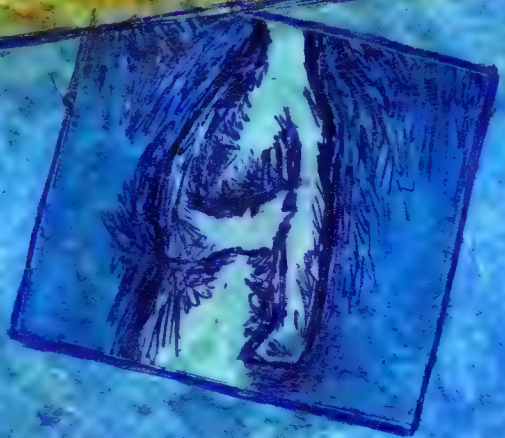
So what did I feel for Houska?
Maybe something, maybe nothing.

I don't want to end up alone,
much less knowing that I mistreated someone.
A girl, no less!



One beautiful girl who didn't deserve any of it.
But who deserves to be mistreated, anyway? No one I know.





She deserves someone better than me.

Someone who can truly express
their feelings beyond the vagueness
that lies in their mind.

Someone who can say they love her,
whose love is solid as a rock,
a love that reaffirms that
no one is truly alone...

A love so bright, within both of them,
that it shines like the sun.

Someone should shower her
with as many flowers as they can.
Well, that's what I thought
before everything fell apart,
and that's how things ended
for both of us.
In fairness, things never really started between us.
Now, all that remains
is for me to apologize.
Only then, I believe,
will we feel better about ourselves.

I want to apologize,
but will it even matter
after all of the things
I have done?
It wasn't just me
picking her flowers.
It was murder

I went there
and killed the things
she cared for the most,
right in front
of her.

They were screaming in pain
and there were like
a million flowers in the field,
could you imagine a million voices
screaming in your head?

I did not listen,
but Houska did.

It's something unforgivable, and yet, I demand forgiveness.
That's all I can do.

Flowers...
I could comment on the fact that science has yet to prove
that plants have consciousness
and can therefore feel pain like we do,
but that wouldn't help me at all.
There are moments when
even the most precise and well-intentioned words
make someone sound like an insensitive, heartless idiot
and, let's be fair,
science and emotions don't mix very well.

Logic can't solve
all of our problems.
If it did, then I could just
figure out how to use
Moominpappa's time machine
to travel back in time
and slap myself in the face
for ever making Houska cry
and recoil in fear.
Yeah, science, emotions,
not a good mix, not at all.

Now, if I slapped my past self,
would I feel the pain then or now?
Either way, it wouldn't solve anything.
Violence, against yourself and others,
is never the answer.
I know it because on that day, back on the pier...
I almost drowned.

It wasn't my intention.
All I wanted was to be left on my own and to wash my face
with some cold water. When I took a few steps
down the ladder to see a reflection of myself
on the ocean's surface, I noticed that
behind me were Moomintroll,
Snorkmaiden and Little My in a hurry.

They thought I would end my life
right there, and maybe I wanted to,
but it's something I don't like
to think about.

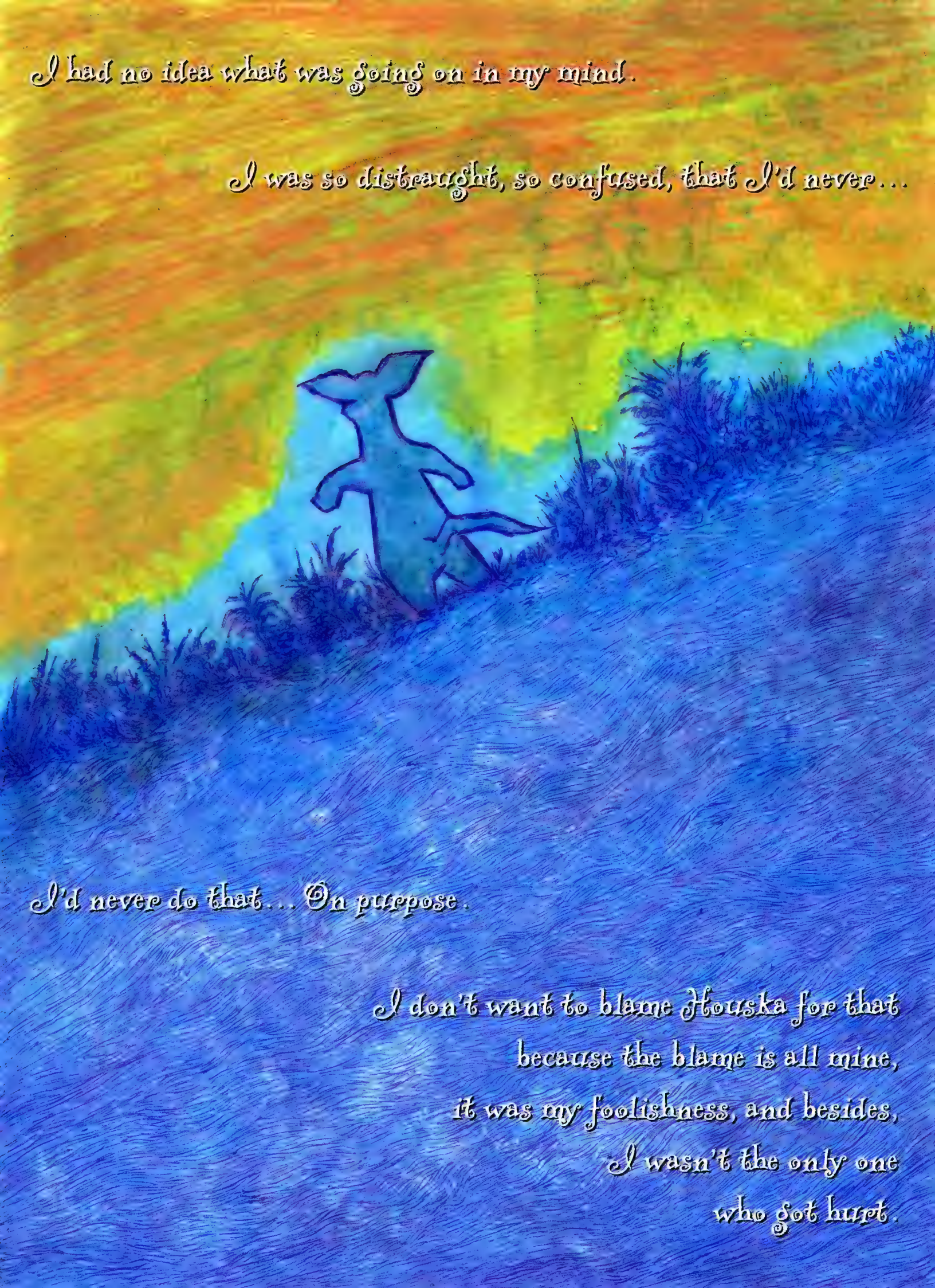
I'm afraid of drowning
because I can't swim
and when someone drowns,
it's silent.

No one would hear me
if I sank
into the depths.

What a pitiful way
of biting the dust,
and I got plenty of years
ahead of me.

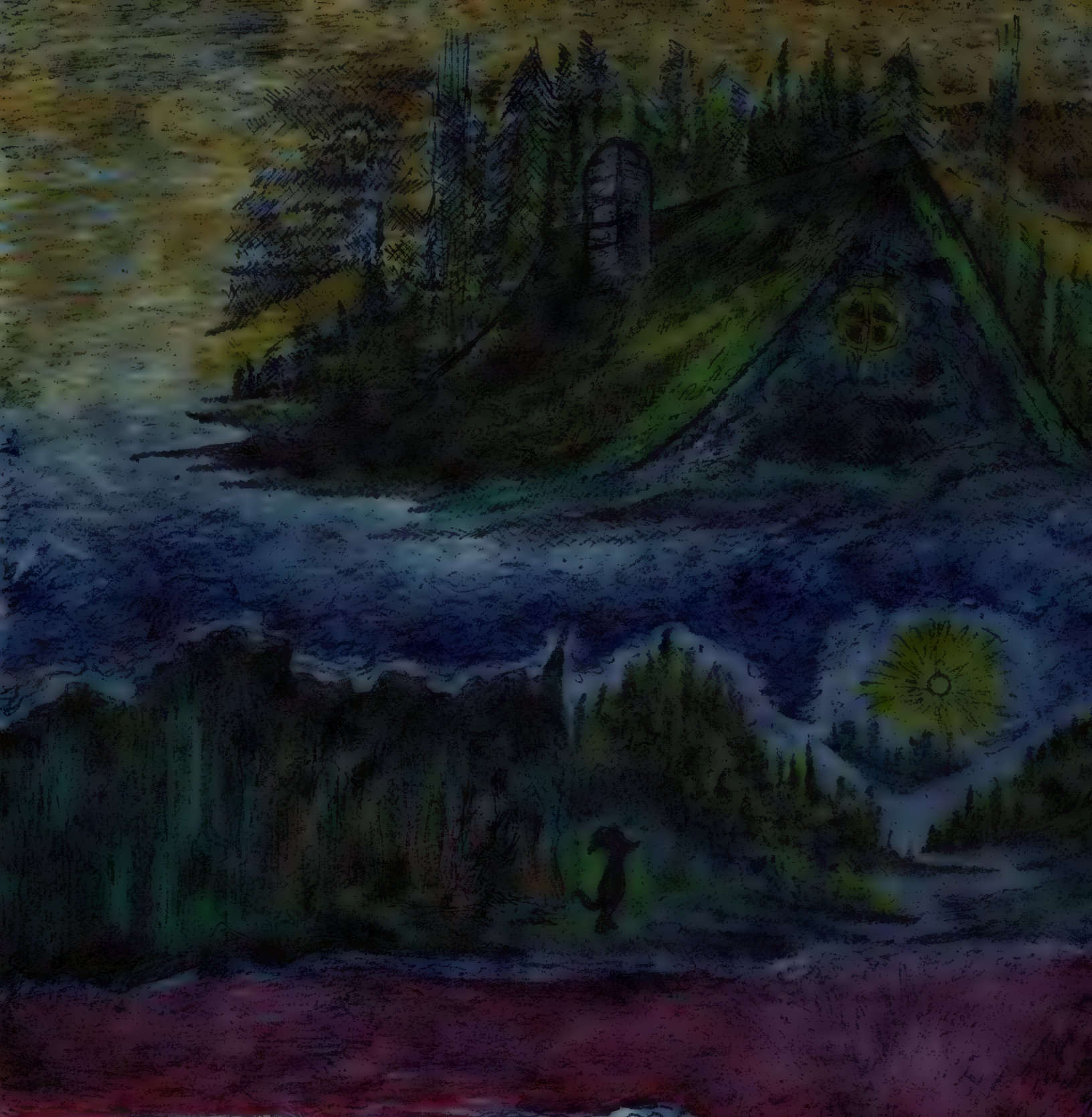
I had no idea what was going on in my mind.

I was so distraught, so confused, that I'd never...



I'd never do that... On purpose.

I don't want to blame Houska for that
because the blame is all mine,
it was my foolishness, and besides,
I wasn't the only one
who got hurt.



Complicated, isn't it?
Now that I'm thinking clearly,
my words should come out clearly.
I hope so, for my own sake.

I have to watch my step
because I don't want to
crush any flowers
under my feet.

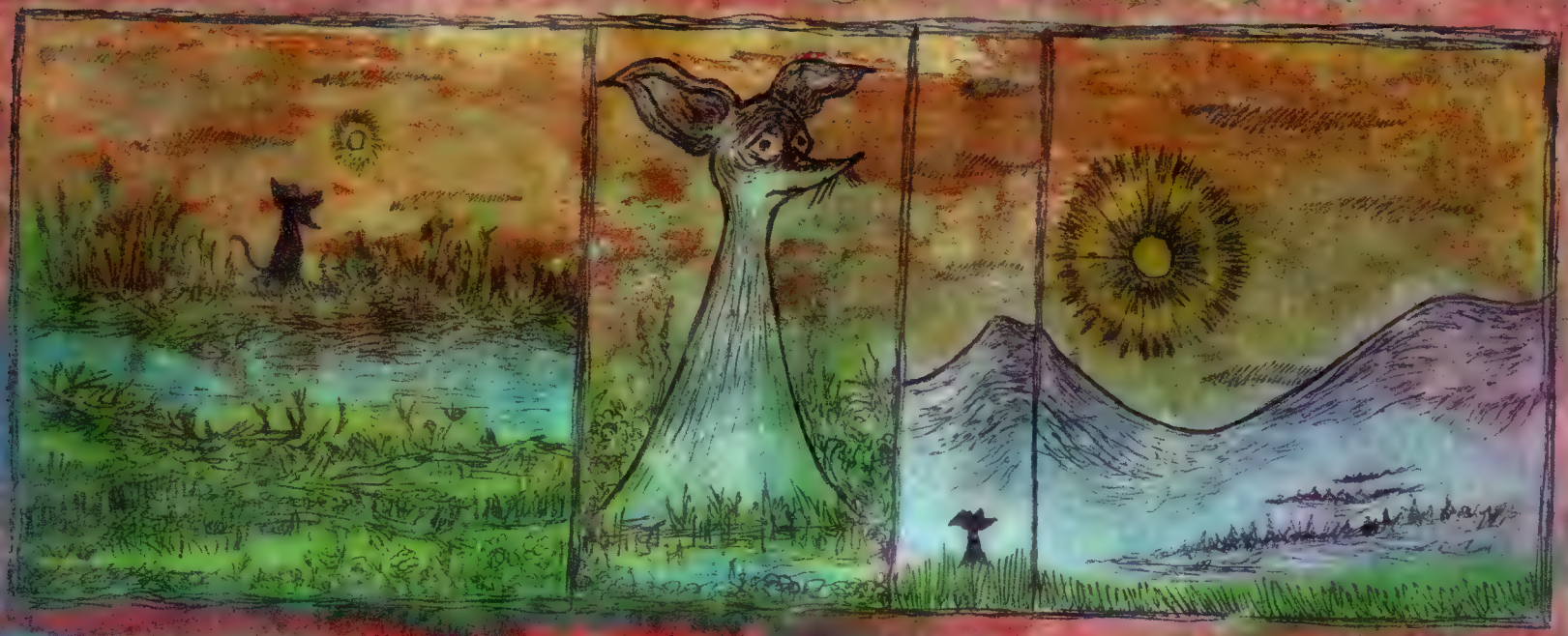
I don't want
to be responsible
for the death of
a million unborn plants.

Do plants know
what death is?
It's inevitable,
but do they know?

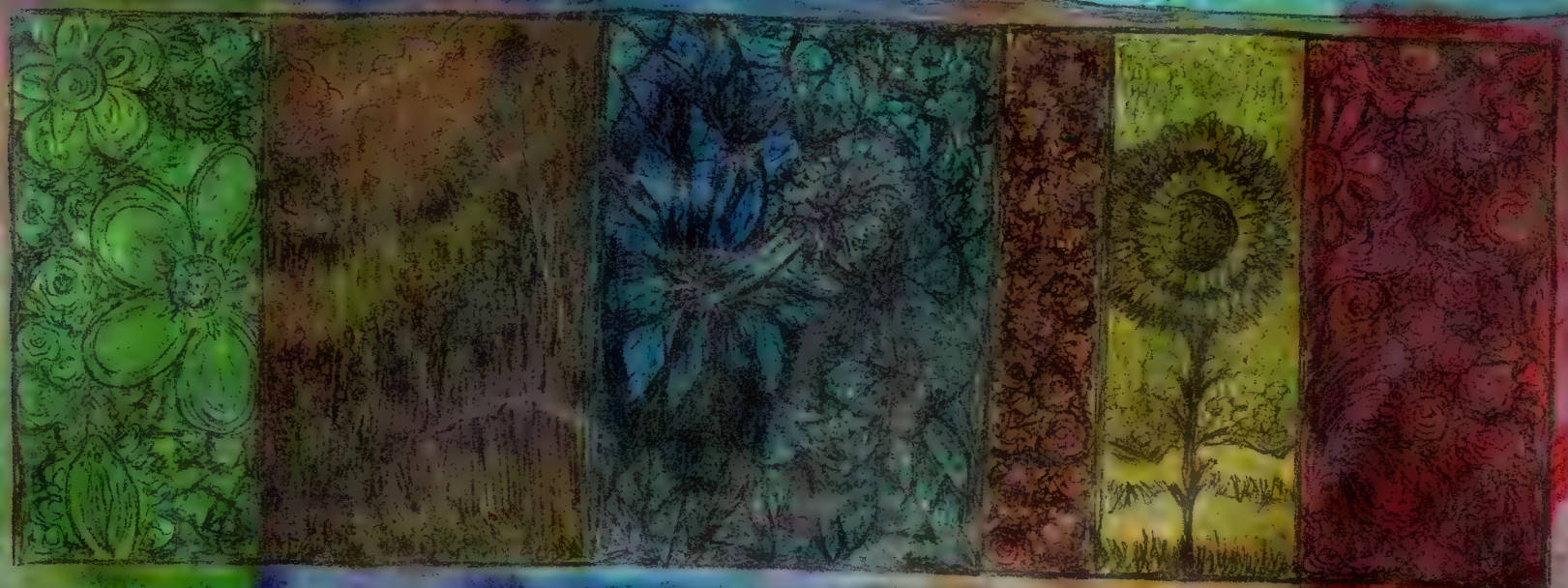
I think so,
all life knows death
in some way.

Otherwise,
why would seeds exist?
Why do we struggle
to leave things
and the best of us behind?

Now, here's a better question: Do plants feel empathy, pain, anxiety, joy, loneliness?



I thought I would find one answer that made sense in the books I read, but I suppose not everything has to make sense.



Books aren't written by plants, so who knows how they truly feel.

The closest I got to an answer
that kind of made sense came from my parents.

Months ago,
when I visited my old folks,
we talked for hours about
their collection of buttons
from around the world,

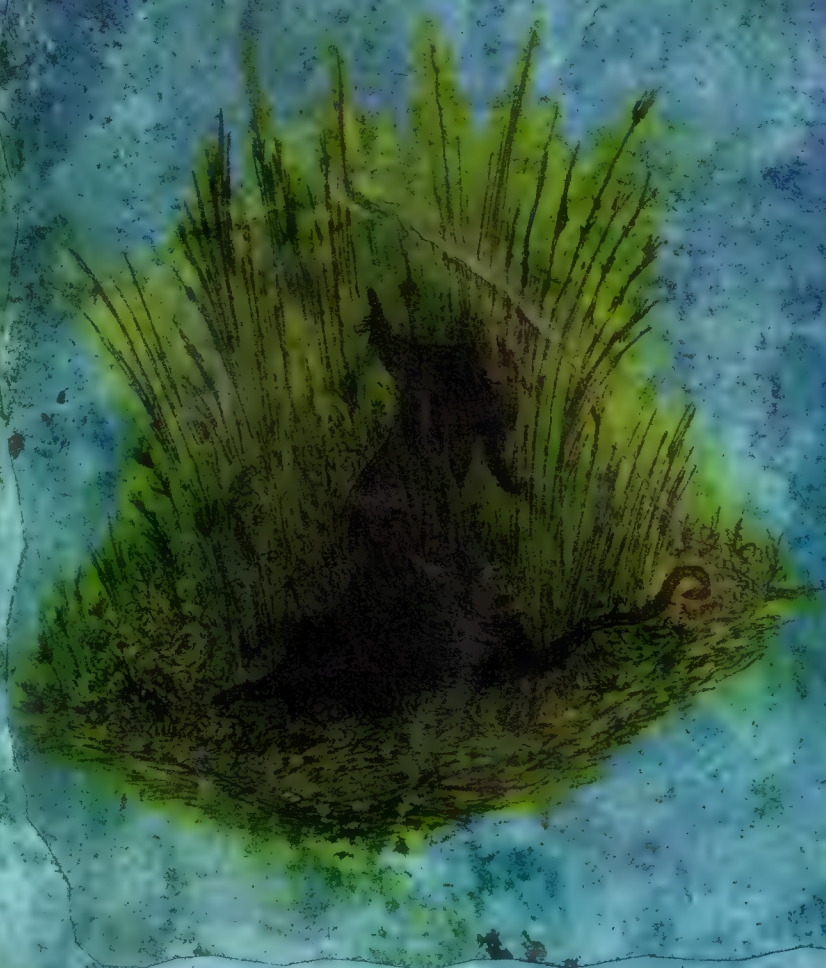
a favorite subject
in all our conversations,

and then I asked them if plants could think,
to which my mother said that

"Yes! They do! Plants are aware of their surroundings.
Otherwise, what's the point of growing above the ground?".

My father
seemingly agreed,
although he also
added that trees
are not
aware of vanity
despite lots of people
saying they're beautiful.

Or maybe it's because they're deaf, I mean,
have you ever seen a plant with a pair of ears?



I don't think they need them to live,
and for how long have plants lived?
They came before us, didn't they?
Without them, we would not be alive.

I feel quite optimistic today
despite my great sorrow.

I suppose all philosophers have felt this way
at some point in their lives.

I don't consider myself a philosopher,
not the serious kind.

Like, if the Muskrat and I
stood side by side,
anyone could tell we are at odds
in every way,

but sometimes there are days
when I find myself reflecting
in great detail
on the things I've done
and what I can do to improve myself
over my past failures.

I think that's what it means to grow up,

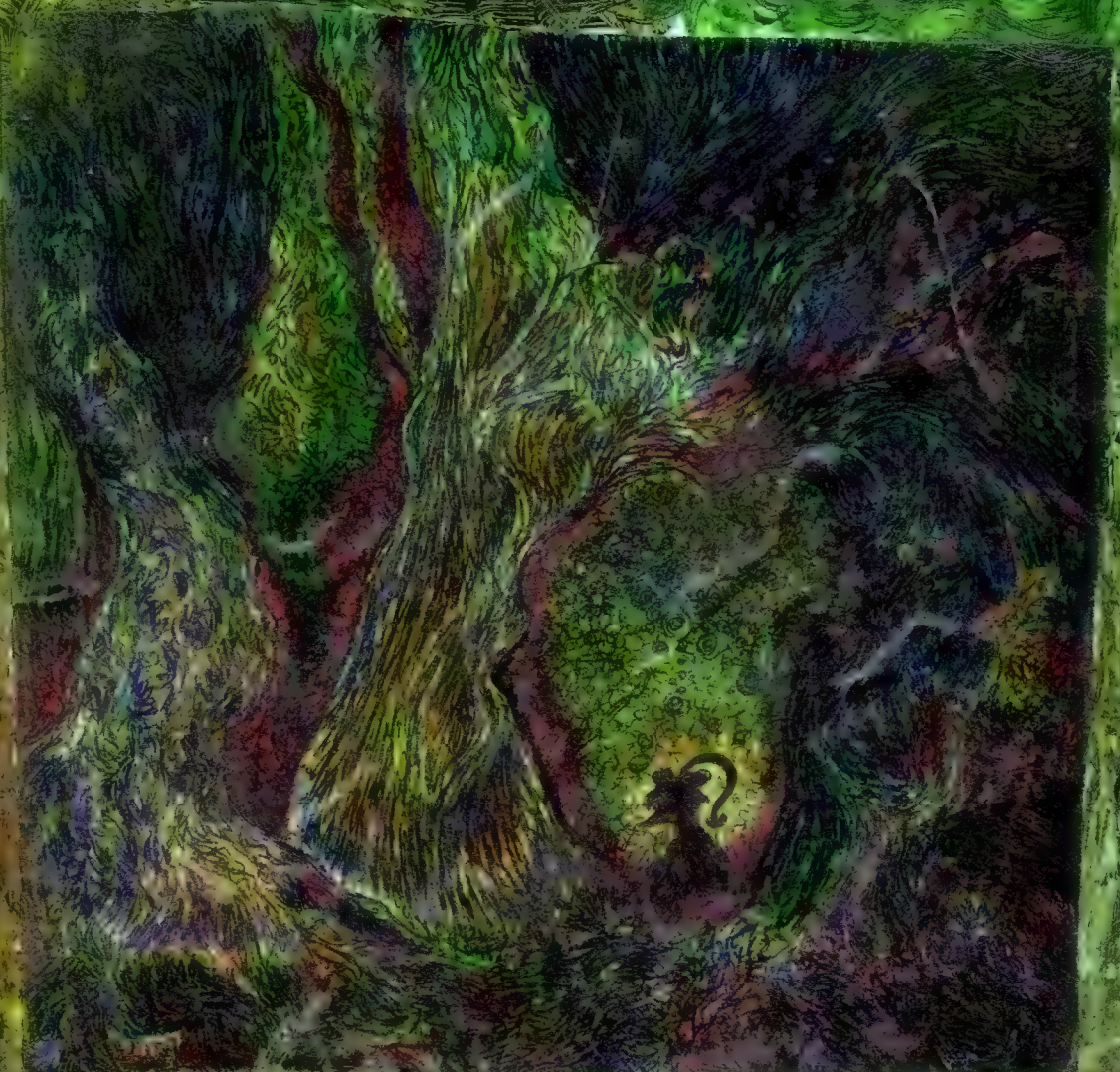
and I see that, after all this time and the pain

we've inflicted on each other and ourselves,

Houska looks so . . .

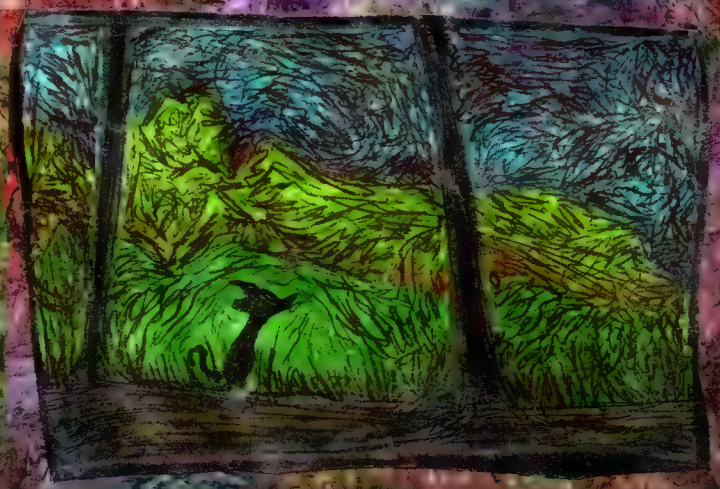
I'd say alone,

but the flowers in the field are her company.



She looks the same as before, yet something in her is different this time. Has she grown up? Or maybe it's me, I didn't have this feeling in the beginning.

She is beautiful,
that I can't deny,
but it's strange,
I don't care about
her beauty or
the shape of her nose
or how her nose and mine
look alike...



Heh, it's the kind of coincidence
that makes life
so bizarre and unusual.

Other than her nose,
I see someone else
besides Houska...

It's me.

I see myself in her. I can see it clearly...

Not this me as a whole, but the better half of me,

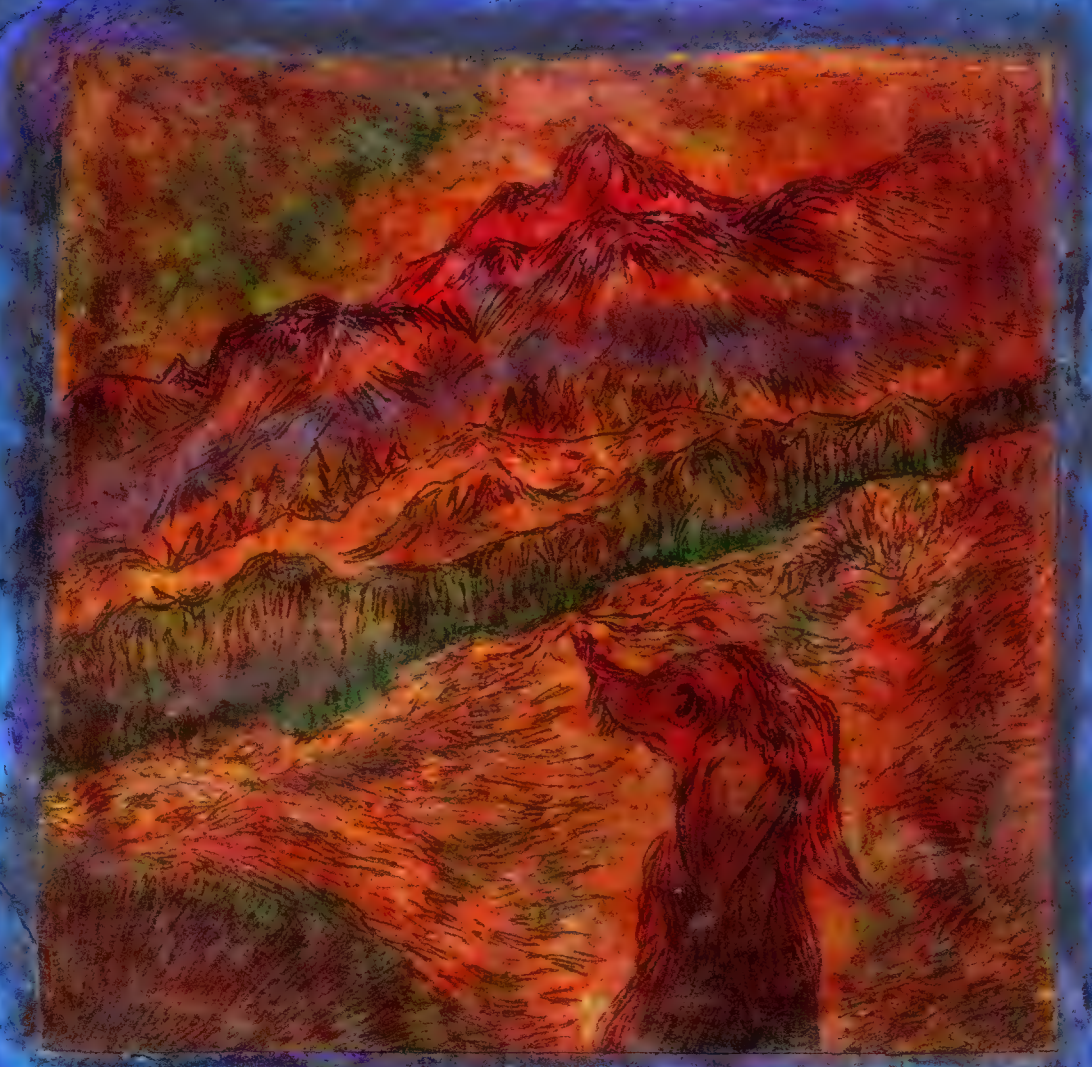
the one who didn't spend years in search of a money tree.

I never had a garden of my own
and I never considered the world in general as such.
Instead of making life grow,
my only desire was to grow wealth,

but there's a part of me that just wants to live
without the fear of having no purpose.

If in life, or at least in my life,
I was taught that the only purpose
is to earn other's respect
the same way one earns money
and accumulates
material possessions,

then what else is there
left for me to do?



By gaining or finding riches,
I confirm my own existence.

In the past, which can also mean yesterday,
I was often accused of being greedy,
of not caring about others except myself,

but if I wasn't like that,
then my essence would disappear
without anyone knowing I existed,
or so I thought.

Money has value, but it has no life; in the end,
it's just round pieces of metal or paper that can easily burn up.
Plants, however... How much life someone or something
needs to have in order to be considered
worthy of someone's affection?

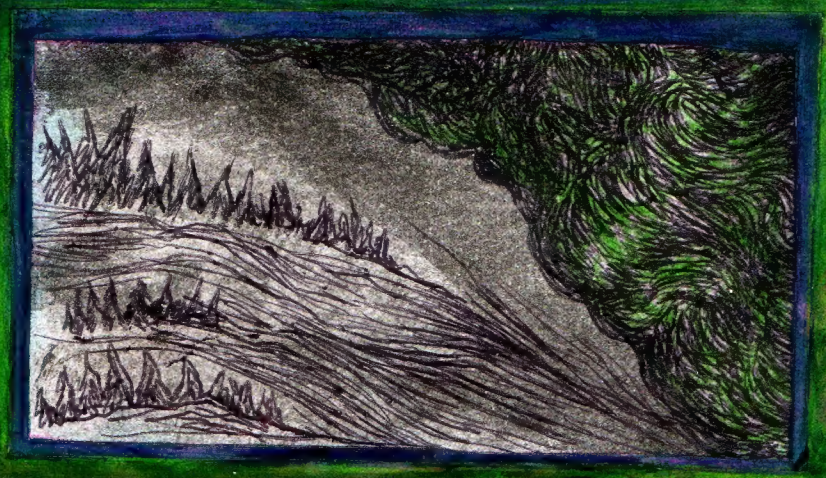
What would Houska say?
Probably something about how she treats plants,
as well as birds, frogs, insects and all sorts of animals
as just as sentient and worthy of comfort as people
because, well, I have no idea.
"If you're kind to others, kindness will come back to you",
as the saying goes.
I was anything but kind with her back then.

The gap between my own
inner emptiness and her
inner abundance...

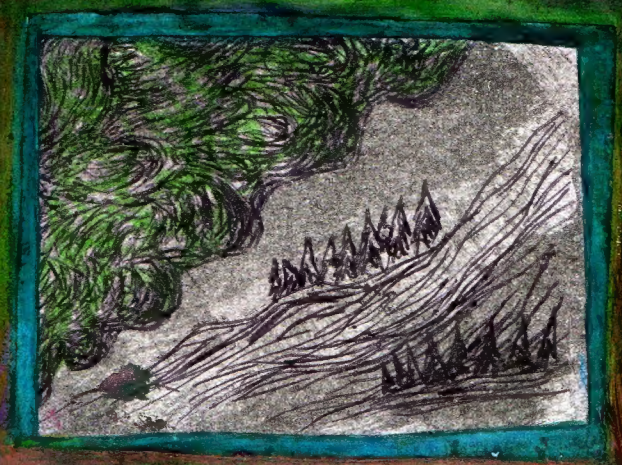
I don't deserve to be here,
her smile is killing me.
What if I take that smile
away from her too?

How far will I allow
my greed to treat others
like possessions?

To what extent can
my darkest impulses ruin
not only my life, but also
someone else's life altogether?



Whatever
I decide
to do,
I can't change
what has
already happened,
but the future
holds a lot
of possibilities.



It's
not
the end
of the world,
the comet
approaching,
the tides rising...
I know it's hard,
but I can do it.

I'll talk with her, sooner or later.
I just have to think a little more about it,
I have so many things to say,
so many thoughts to sort out...
Which ones to share, which ones to listen to,
which ones to ignore...
I want to see Houska, hear her voice
and listen to what she has to say.
Will I agree or disagree with her words?
I'll only know if I hear
someone else's voice besides mine.

ALKV

"This story is dedicated to all those
who find themselves in a complicated situation,
riddled with dilemmas and ordeals of all kinds,
from which it seems difficult to break free
or impossible even to take a step closer to a future
that remains full of possibilities
and untraveled paths."

Janet Wallace